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# Mapping Pre-Westphalia Europe: Military Alliances, Political Settlements, and Alignments During Armed Conflicts, 1528 to 1648

*Social and Economic History*

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## Abstract

This article introduces two new datasets detailing shifts in alliances and alignments in Europe throughout the century prior to the Peace of Westphalia. The datasets identify a list of key actors in the European sphere during this time period and introduce two ways of tracking diplomatic shifts. The Formal Military Alliances and Political Settlements dataset (FMAPS) lists all formal treaties and agreements reached between major actors in the European sphere that codified a form of alliance among them and for which a start and end year could be identified. The Alignments During Armed Conflicts Dataset (ADACS) lists parties' alignments during the period's major armed conflicts. Both datasets were compiled through review of available literature about diplomatic ententes and armed conflicts throughout the period from 1528 to 1648. While the article outlines a few potential weaknesses of the datasets, the authors demonstrate their value for historical and social science research, as well as network analysis.

## Keywords

Peace of Westphalia – alliances – history – network analysis

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– Related data set "European Alliances & Alignments (1528–1648) V1.0" with DOI www.doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HRKWWB in repository "Harvard Dataverse"

## 1. Introduction

The 1648 Peace of Westphalia is considered one of the greatest diplomatic feats in European history. Indeed, it ushered in a new era of stability and peace that had been elusive in the context of tumultuous geopolitical realities (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Among the primary motivators of conflict had been great power competition between the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) and France. Moreover, internal religious fractures within larger polities had often led to conflicts within and across borders (Gross, 1948). By addressing a plethora of questions that had plagued the continent's diplomatic sphere, and creating ententes that cooled major rivalries, the Peace of Westphalia represented a tectonic shift for the continent's international relations.

How the Peace of Westphalia suddenly emerged out of the Thirty Years' War has been a question historians have puzzled over for centuries. Yet methods for quantitatively analyzing the nature of diplomatic shifts that enabled the signing of such a major agreement have been lacking. In large part, this is due to the lack of well-organized, comprehensive data on the diplomatic agreements and alignments of the era. While there is much literature describing formal agreements during this time period, as well as alignments in cases of armed conflicts, key data such as the parties involved, and the dates and duration of the agreements, are scattered throughout miscellaneous sources, largely buried in descriptive accounts. The lack of a dataset that clearly lays out, year by year, the agreements and alignments between Europe's most important actors, makes it difficult to conduct a quantitative analysis of diplomatic shifts over time during this era.

We created two datasets: Formal Military Alliances and Political Settlements (FMAPS), and Alignments During Armed Conflicts Dataset (ADACS). They allow scholars to employ quantitative methods to analyze alliances between European actors from 1528 to 1648 and to explore shifts in the run-up to Westphalia that could elucidate a sudden pivot towards peace and stability that had seemed so improbable. Ultimately, while this data is as of yet an imperfect accounting of the totality of diplomatic developments during this period, we will argue that building on these two datasets will allow political scientists and historians to draw out interesting quantitative insights that were previously unattainable.

## 2. Research Problem

The period from 1528 to 1648 was marked by diplomatic volatility, with perpetual inter- and intra-state conflict throughout the European continent (Gutmann, 1988). As discussed above, however, the Peace of Westphalia represented a major break from the region's perpetual geopolitical tensions and helped secure a more peaceful era of European diplomacy. The advent of Westphalia thus presents interesting questions for both historians and political scientists.

For historians, the origins of the Peace of Westphalia remain a point of fervent debate. Some accounts argue that Westphalia was a means for France and her partners to weaken the HRE. Indeed, the Peace reigned in the HRE's power by expanding the rights of its constituent states and limiting the authority of the Emperor (Gross, 1948). The 1648 accords may therefore have emanated from the growing strength of the HRE's rivals, who were determined to permanently debilitate their primary opponent.

Others posit that it was sheer "war exhaustion" that pushed the feuding European states to lay down their arms in favor of diplomacy. Under this view, it was states' fears of depleting their resources through constant infighting that pushed them to find common ground. Yet this explanation faces certain challenges. Namely, while some of the smaller states were indeed running low on economic and military resources by 1648, bigger parties such as France and the HRE were perfectly capable of sustaining their war efforts (Wilson, 2008a).

Historians have also frequently emphasized the importance of religious rivalries in the pre-Westphalia period. The 16th and 17th centuries were marked by religious alliances, with Northern Protestant nations frequently partnering against Southern Catholic blocs (Wilson, 2008b). In many ways, the Thirty Years' War was the culmination of decades of religious tensions in the region. Leo Gross wrote that

> the Thirty Years' War had its origin, at least partially, in a religious conflict, or [...] religious intolerance. The Peace of Westphalia consecrated the principle of toleration by establishing equality between Protestant and Catholic states and by providing some safeguards for religious minorities.
>
> GROSS, 1948, pp. 22–23

Viewed in this light, the Peace of Westphalia was motivated primarily by a growing desire to settle the continent's most pressing religious issues.

For political scientists, the Peace of Westphalia is a monumental event that permits diverging branches of international relations theory to find evidence of their primary tenets. Under the liberal international relations theory, it is domestic interests, filtered through domestic institutions, that shape government leaders' preferences and ultimately the behavior of the state (Moravcsik, 1997). Under this view, alliances and alignments would be driven by various developments in each state's domestic sphere.

A more granular, individual-level approach to international relations would explain events like the Peace of Westphalia as the unique result of actions by key personalities (Isaak, 1974). In the Peace of Westphalia negotiations, diplomats dealt with myriad intersecting problems—such as religious, security and sovereignty concerns—that affected Europe's most important players. Rather than ending in the overwhelming victory of any one party, the Thirty Years' War saw "the opposing armies [fight] each other to an unsteady standstill, and the opposite sides were coalitions each with a welter of cross-purposes, so that the skills of negotiators were needed to bring peace out of confusion" (Rowen, 1961, p. 53). Some political scientists may therefore explain the outcome of the negotiations primarily as a result of the specific personalities grappling with the conflict.

By contrast, the neoclassical realist account of international relations views states as responding in large part to the constraints and opportunities of the international system when they conduct their foreign and security policies (Taliaferro et al., 2009). In this vein, they make decisions about how to align themselves in conflicts based primarily on internal and external constraints that affect their position within this system (Taliaferro et al., 2009). A neoclassical realist might thus be interested in how shifting alliances over time shaped the prospects for war and peace on the continent.

The century prior to Westphalia thus raises myriad questions and possible explanations for researchers in the fields of history and political science. Each approach described above, however, can benefit from access to clearly organized data about the evolution of alliance relationships over time. If the individual-level theory of international relations holds true, for instance, it is less likely that any noticeable patterns would emerge in the century of diplomatic relations prior to the Peace of Westphalia. Indeed, if diplomatic ententes are the one-off results of successful negotiations by individuals, we would not necessarily expect to see long-term shifts in the shape of the international system prior to the striking of a major international agreement. By contrast, neoclassical realists may hope to find evidence—in patterns of alliance shifts over time—of changes in the balance of power that permitted the Peace of Westphalia to take place.

## 3. Data and Methods

– **European Alliances & Alignments (1528–1648) V1.0 deposited at Harvard Dataverse** – DOI: www.doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HRKWWB
– **Temporal coverage:** 1528–1648

We constructed two separate datasets (compiled into one multi-sheet excel document), to track formal alliances and diplomatic alignments throughout this time period (Bell et al., 2021). Each dataset is organized as a binary system listing 'allies' and 'non-allies', for each year we studied, from 1528 to 1648.

### 3.1. *Formal Military Alliances and Political Settlements*

The Formal Military Alliances and Political Settlements (FMAPS) dataset lists all formal military and political agreements identified through review of scholarly compilations of historical international agreements, as well as scouring reliable open sources, such as Encyclopaedia Britannica. As we combed through our chosen literature, we sought to find three key pieces of information about all formal ententes: their start date, end date, and all parties that were formally committed to the agreements. The dataset lists the source material for each piece of data we were able to collect. The final product is a table that, for each instance of an entente between two or more parties, includes a unique identifying number; a start date; an end date; the name of the agreement; the type of agreement it was (i.e., Alliance or Truce); and a list of all parties involved. FMAPS includes 51 unique agreements.

We based our assessment of agreements worthy of inclusion in the FMAPS dataset on the criterion used in the Correlates of War Project's 'Formal Alliances' dataset, compiled by Douglas Gibler, a reputable and widely used source of data for social science research.[1] Accordingly, any formal, recorded agreement between at least two states that intended to either limit confrontation between the two parties, or commit them to a form of alliance, was

1 The agreements included in the CoW Formal Alliances dataset, as per the CoW website (CoW, 2022):

"The Correlates of War Formal Alliance data set seeks to identify each formal alliance between at least two states that fall into the classes of defense pact, neutrality or non-aggression treaty, or entente agreement. A defense pact is the highest level of military commitment, requiring alliance members to come to each other's aid militarily if attacked by a third party. As the labels imply, neutrality and non-aggression pacts pledge signatories to either remain neutral in case of conflict or to not use or otherwise support the use of force against the other alliance members. Finally, ententes provide for the least commitment and obligate members to consult in times of crisis or armed attack"

included in FMAPS. Excluded from this dataset, however, are any economic or trade pacts. While these are undoubtedly geopolitically important, we sought to limit our dataset to the CoW's standards of 'Formal Alliances'.

Importantly, we made the decision to omit from the dataset any formal ententes that merely settled a conflict without setting out a specific period of truce, or a military or political partnership. This is because the end of a conflict between parties does not necessarily signal any future commitment to maintaining the peace—and European actors frequently resolved conflicts amongst each other only to quickly start new ones. With FMAPS, we were interested in measuring the development, over time, of alliances between European parties, rather than tracking the myriad momentary pauses in conflict between warring factions.

### 3.2. *Alignments During Armed Conflict*

By contrast, 'Alignments During Armed Conflicts' (ADACS) tracks major armed conflicts, and how parties on each "side" of the conflict were aligned. The data is drawn from *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492–2015*, an encyclopedia that lists and describes all major armed conflicts during our period of study (Clodfelter, 2017). The work includes a description of each armed conflict, and identifies, for each war, a start and end date, as well as what parties were involved on either side of the conflict.

While Clodfelter does not provide us with his own definition of a 'major armed conflict', his work by its very nature excludes conflicts that do not report casualties. We made two decisions in using Clodfelter's work.

1) We did not impose a casualty threshold past which we considered a conflict 'major', as we felt a firm number would ultimately be arbitrary, and limit the dataset in unnecessary ways. Future research could enable us to include a casualty count alongside each conflict, which could then be used by researchers to eliminate from the dataset conflicts they deem not to be 'major'.
2) Because we prepared this dataset for use in network analysis that shows alignments *between* European actors, ADACS excludes all *internal* conflicts—such as civil wars, riots, or rebellions that may in fact cause casualties or be considered major, but are happening between smaller-scale civil society or military components acting *within* the bounds of the actors identified in our dataset.

Our dataset is a compilation of all European wars from 1528 to 1648 that describes the alignment of actors involved in each conflict. This means that for each instance of a conflict with multiple parties, two lines of data are

recorded—one for each 'side' of the war. Thus, if countries A, B and C were in war X against countries F, G, H, the dataset would list war X twice: one side being 'aligned' countries A, B, C, and the other being 'aligned' countries F, G, H. Our dataset includes data for wars that only include two parties going to war with one another—even though neither side captures an 'alignment' between multiple parties. ADACS includes 77 individual instances of conflict, with two sides listed for each conflict.

This form of alignment is an imperfect proxy for describing something as strong as an alliance, as countries may be aligned against a specific actor for a specific purpose, without intending to develop further diplomatic ties to their temporary partners in a particular conflict. Nonetheless, this data allows us to track how different parties in Europe aligned in conflicts over time. Indeed, the sides in any military conflict crystallize around a variety of factors, including shifting interests and parties' ability to convince others to join their cause. Two parties on the same side of a conflict are therefore in a form of partnership—however tenuous it may be.

### 3.3. *Dataset Structure*

The first 'sheet' in the dataset document lists all actors for the time period studied, including alternate names for actors whose names changed between 1528 and 1648. Moreover, for both datasets, we provide a modified version of the data that organizes the information into a dyadic format ('FMPAS Dyads' and 'ADACS Dyads'). The data is thus expanded to list each instance of an alignment between any two parties, for each year where this alignment existed. This allows researchers using the datasets to create, for every year, a map of the existing network of relationships between parties in Europe—and to then track changes in this network map over time. Ultimately, data organized in such a manner should permit researchers to apply quantitative tools to assess the size and significance of European network shifts in the century prior to the Peace of Westphalia.

In creating this dataset, we followed the structure of the Correlates of War Project (CoW, 2021). The CoW Formal Alliances dataset records three kinds of alliances: ententes, mutual defense pacts, and non-aggression treaties. The dataset proceeds to list, in each year, every alliance in a dyadic format. While we did not replicate the same categories of alliances, we maintained the general methodology of the CoW's Formal Alliances dataset.

Below is a concise summary of each sheet in the dataset document:

**Sheet 1** 'ACTORS': List of names of the most significant entities in Europe throughout the period of study, as well as their 3-letter 'Actor Code'.

**Sheet 2** 'ADACS Raw': Alignments during armed conflicts; lists, for each war, the actors on each side (one line per side), as well as the start and end date of the conflict.

**Sheet 3** 'ADACS Dyads': Based on 'ADACS Raw'; lists each instance of an alignment between two parties (a connection between two 'nodes' in the network). It also lists all instances of a conflict between only two parties, meaning the list contains some data that does not describe connections between nodes in the network.

**Sheet 4** 'FMAPS Raw': Formal military alliances and political settlements; lists all the parties we could identify to each significant military or political entente, as well as the start and end dates we were able to find for each agreement.

**Sheet 5** 'FMAPS Dyads': Based on 'FMAPS Raw'; lists each instance of an alignment between two parties (a connection between two nodes in the network).

## 4. Limitations

Despite careful review of several available historical compilations of alliances, ententes, and alignments in armed conflicts, we cannot fully mitigate omitted variable bias. Indeed, we found that various agreements were included in some sources, while being omitted by others, and it is therefore unclear the extent to which the sources we have consulted provide, cumulatively, a complete picture of the diplomatic developments of the era. Nonetheless, we believe that the dataset provides a helpful overview of the period's crucial diplomatic agreements and alignments. They can prove useful for both observational and quantitative studies. We are enthusiastic about the prospect of further expanding this dataset—perhaps by adding data from longer-term primary source and archival research projects—in order to mitigate omitted variable bias.

Moreover, certain treaties had to be omitted because we were unable to find information about their duration. Though the major conflicts and armistices are undoubtedly present, some inter-state interactions for which we could not locate an adequate timeline of the duration of the arrangement between parties (i.e., where we could not find a clear end date in the literature describing these agreements) were not included. Because our data is organized in a dyadic format, recording an agreement as having occurred in a particular year without having an available end date would effectively describe a year-long alignment between parties, thereby including data that could potentially be inaccurate.

Lastly, the European continent over the course of the 1528 to 1648 period was far from having a consistent set of actors. One of the challenges in compiling our dataset was to decide how to record particular actors whose borders changed over time. States' territories and names often changed, while new states and quasi-states emerged and quickly disappeared. In recording these actors, we tried to maintain consistency, allowing actors for whom only names changed to remain listed as a single actor, while recording truly new actors on the international stage under different identifiers.

## 5. Conclusion

Both the FMAPS and ADACS datasets provide crucial data on alliances and alignments on the European continent throughout the period from 1528 to 1648. While the data has certain limitations, it provides a valuable initial overview of the era's diplomatic dynamics, allowing both historians and political scientists to draw insights about the evolution of European alliance networks over time.

The datasets are especially valuable for scientists who apply network analysis methods. A well-established method to explore the connections between actors in communities, network analysis has been less prominent as a means of studying the developments in the international political system. A notable exception is Kyle Joyce and Zeev Maoz's pioneering work. Studying the effect of wars that change states' 'strategic environment' on alliance networks, for instance, Maoz and Joyce argue that "states that experience dramatic changes in their strategic environment increase network connectivity", i.e., they increase their number of diplomatic partnerships within a given network (Maoz & Joyce, 2016, p. 292). In order to draw out such insights, scholars need to create network 'maps', whose changes they can then track over time. These maps are snapshots—at given points in time—of all connections (whether defined as 'alliances', 'economic partnerships' or other ties) between parties (nodes) in a given network (in the case of our datasets, the European continent). Researchers can then assess how patterns of changes in these networks correlate with other variables. Our datasets are organized in a dyadic format that provides a comprehensive list of 'connections' (alliances and alignments) between European actors we could identify for over a century prior to the Peace of Westphalia. Because our data's formatting is modeled on that of other prominent sources for political science research, particularly the Correlates of War project, it is readily usable for network analysis-driven research.

For example, our data allows us to visualize the diplomatic networks in 1617 (right before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War) as follows:

Figure 1 showcases all alignments, as captured by our FMAPS and ADACS datasets, between active actors during the year 1617. Each point (node) on the graphic refers to a party we were able to identify from the 1528–1648 period. A line between two points refers broadly to an alignment either in the form of a formal military or political settlement (a codified alliance listed in FMAPS) or if two parties fought on the same side of an armed conflict (as recorded in the ADACS dataset). Tracking changes in these maps over time can permit us to identify shifts in which actors are more or less central to the overall system, as well as track any changing patterns in which actors have a tendency to align.

Additionally, negotiation network analysis can provide an overview of the importance of certain diplomatic relationships over time. In Figure 2, each dot (node) represents an actor from the 1528–1648 period. Unlike in Figure 1,

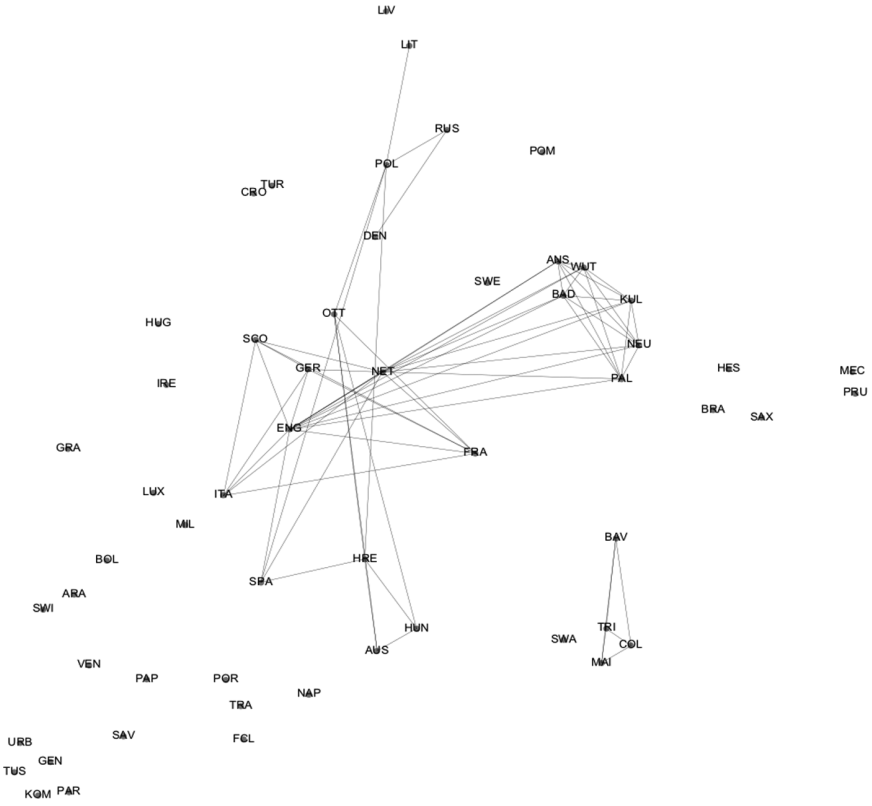


FIGURE 1 European alliance network map (1617)

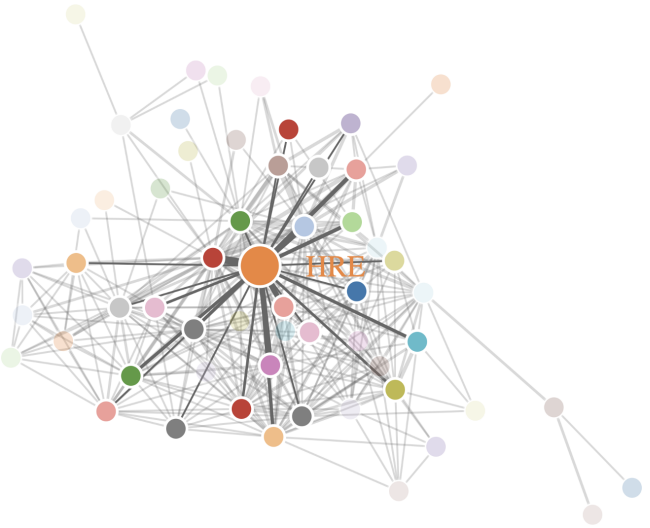


FIGURE 2 European alignments in military conflicts (1538–1638)

however, this diagram reflects *all* alignments each actor had throughout the *entire* period of study, as recorded by our ADACS dataset. In addition, we programmed the diagram to reflect the strength of particular relationships—indeed, the thicker the line between actors, the more times they have been aligned during conflicts that involved them. The map we produced was also 'interactive,' in that one can hover over each dot to obtain the actor code (which has an associated, full name in our dataset), and highlight only this actor's connections in a darker color. Myriad connections between actors who frequently ended up on the opposite side of geopolitical conflicts suggest volatility in military alignments throughout our period of study. Here, the Holy Roman Empire's (HRE) military alignments over our period of study are highlighted, showing the HRE, with its myriad connections (including several with strong lines suggesting multiple instances of alignments), was a central, if sometimes shifting, player in European geopolitics over the period of study.

Ultimately, we hope that these datasets can be further expanded through deeper archival research in order to provide the most comprehensive view of the evolution of diplomatic alliances and alignments in Europe from 1528 to 1648. The FMAPS and ADACS datasets offer a unique snapshot of diplomacy throughout this era, which could enable researchers in both history and political science to draw out new insights.

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